Games coder Steve Howard discusses Bride of Frankenstein and Werewolves in London

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

Having researched the undead life out of the 8-bit Bride of Frankenstein and Werewolves of London games for my recent retrospective articles, I was still left with a few unanswered questions. So who better to ask than their coder, Steve Howard?

After working on everything from low-level Spectrum and Enterprise games coding to contemporary PS4 and WiiU titles for a variety of different publishers, Steve is still in the business after 30 years, now with Icon Games. He's experienced in multiple coding languages including Assembly, C, C++ and Unity.

Most important of all, he maintains a keen interest in his back-catalogue and retro gamers' appreciation/bashing of them. They *do* tend to be met with a very mixed reception it has to be said. Today we'll just be addressing the two that piqued my interest recently.

Q. Are you able to clear up what happened to Ariolasoft, and which versions of Werewolves of London (if any) were considered complete when they filed for bankruptcy?

A. Firstly it was a while ago so there are things I may have forgotten or misremembered.

I did the programming and my partner at the time handled the business side of things and provided me with artwork and

music. I wrote the lead version for Amstrad CPC and that was fully finished. The Spectrum and C64 versions were converted by 3rd parties. Although they were provided with source code I think they did the conversions without looking at it, just based on playing the game. The Spectrum version I don't think was properly finished, and the C64 I think was, but it got the gameplay balance all wrong.

Regarding Ariolasoft, this I can't remember the timeline fully. I'm pretty sure the CPC version was released before they went bust, but not sure about the other 2 versions. I have a CPC 6128 Ariolasoft version so they were definitely produced.

I also don't know exactly what happened to Ariolasoft, however, trying to make money out of computer games has always been a bit of a gamble.
Not sure if that answers your question.

Q. Do you know if there were ever any attempts made to acquire an official license from Warren Zevon or Universal? (the studio behind American Werewolf in London).

A. I think we got some money from Ariolasoft, however, all I remember of those years was always having difficulty finding money for rent etc. And no, as far as I know there were no attempts to acquire a license. When I was making it I was thinking of American Werewolf, but my partner who came up with the initial concept was thinking of Warren Zevon's song as 1) he would be playing the record (or tape) when I visited him, and 2) the tune is actually in the game. Also the title of the game matches the song. However, you used to get away with a lot in those days.

Q. Is there anything you planned to implement that had to be cut due to time or technical limitations? I noticed that everything discussed in the previews came to pass, so things seem to have gone to plan based on your intentions at that stage.

A. I'm pretty certain everything we planned for the game was implemented. The biggest problem was finding space to fit things and it's possible I may have ditched the odd frame of animation here or there, but I don't think we ditched any actual features. I remember someone saying they waited ages to see if an underground train would come, but I don't think we ever seriously thought about implementing one.

BTW, on another note, it was quite late into creating the game before we came up with a reason for him to be eating those people.

Q. In the preview and review articles there are half a dozen or so references to 'Sloaney types' or 'Sloane Rangers', plus one alluded to going on a 'Fiona hunt'. Was this something that was printed in the first run of the manual? I've not been able to find it so can't tell. It definitely wasn't in the documentation that came with the re-release. Not the Spectrum version I have anyway. It makes me wonder if it was toned down so as to be more politically correct/avoid alienating large groups of potential customers.

'Fiona-hunting' appears to be an allusion to this being a popular name amongst posh people/aristocrats. Well, maybe back then.

> "But the life style of the Sloane Ranger is just as important as the uniform. It is the relatively impenetrable life style of the English very upper middle class. It is full of country shooting weekends, inherited antique furniture, and a preference for such names as Caroline, Fiona and Emma."

A. Ahh yes, I'd half forgotten that. My partner in the original concept and until quite close to completion was saying that he was eating 'Sloaney types' and presumably would have been describing it, though when introducing it to magazines etc. early on and possibly even after it had been published as that would have been how he'd viewed the game for a long time. I was uncomfortable with that as 1) as you said it could alienate some people, and 2) there wasn't a reason why he was doing this. So in the end we ended up with him eating relatives to lift a curse. A bit weak admittedly, and I think he still referred to the relatives as Sloaneys. And in this case by Sloaneys my partner meant the posh people definition. I hadn't heard it before he mentioned it.

Q. Sinclair User reported prior to release that a demo of Werewolves of London would be presented at the PCW show

at Olympia, London (25th - 27th September, 1987). "A real live werewolf has been promised too!" the news snippet stated.

Were you involved in that? Was anyone mauled to death? ;)

A. LOL, sorry, that is the 1st I have heard of that. It was kind of sad how the Spectrum version turned out as it had been hyped up to a lot of Spectrum magazines, so they were very disappointed with the finished product.

Q. What was the deal with all the different sub-labels under Ariolasoft? There was 39 Steps, Viz Design, and Reaktor. Then the German parent company was renamed United Software.

A. Viz Design was Paul Smith and myself so basically developers. The rest I'm not sure about. I also wrote Bride of Frankenstein which it seems was published under 39 Steps. I think 39 Steps could also be considered a publisher, but under Ariolasoft. Maybe they wanted separate publishers depending on genre or something. Not sure about Reaktor.

Q. Do you know anything about the lyricless 'Werewolf Rap - Silver Bullet mix' that was included on the B side of the Spectrum cassette? I don't think anyone was credited for that.

A. I think Werewolf Rap may have been done by the same person who did the in-game music, although I'm not sure if he was credited either.

I'm pretty sure the 3" disk version had space for the rap thing as well. I expect once it became a budget title it could no longer be justified. Sadly though I know very little about it, apart from vaguely remembering it being played to me when I was given the game music while sitting in Paul's flat in crouch end.

Q. Was there ever any debate about how to handle the name of Frankenstein's monster? I'm sure you're aware that many people assume the monster to be Frankenstein, rather than the scientist who created him. You managed to work around the issue neatly while still capitalising on the recognition factor I thought. Despite Codemasters then muddying the water.

A. It's a shame that no one knows what happened to Paul Smith as he would have all the answers. I just did all the coding, although I did sort of do the music for Bride, well converted a score I had for Toccata in a 'SKY' score book to numbers and played another channel offset by a tiny bit to make it sound a bit fuller (no space to store more than 1 channel)... with the result it sounded a bit off tune... but then as I said, I am just a programmer. :)

I think at the time we weren't too worried about who Frankenstein actual was, also as your article states, it would have made the title a bit of a mouthful. Interesting, I also a

few years later ended up working on the rather dire movie tie in of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein on SNES and Mega Drive.
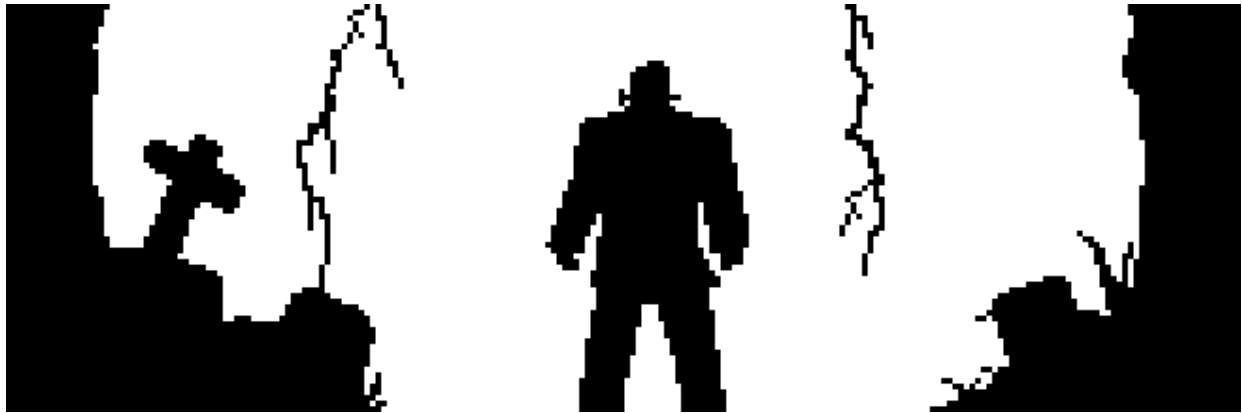
Q. What was the thinking behind Codemasters re-releasing the same game three years later as Frankenstein Jnr with a different protagonist sprite?

A. Regarding Frankenstein Jnr, that was Codemasters' idea. We had got the rights of Bride of Frankenstein back, and for some reason they wanted the main character changing. By that stage I don't think we had the capability to recompile it, so it was done by directly modifying the gfx area in the game data. As an aside, Bride took well over an hour to assemble as the source had to be streamed twice off of a cassette (it was a 2 pass assembler) as I only had a CPC464 at the time. Later on things got better with cross assemblers etc.

Also, another aside, although the gfx engine of Bride and Werewolves looks very similar, Werewolves was a total rewrite as the masking in Bride was too limiting for Werewolves.

Thanks again for generously agreeing to give up your time to settle my curiosities. I'm sure others out there in the retro gaming community will appreciate the insight and trivia as much as I do.

Hope you have a great Christmas and happy new year!